Then I'll Come Back to You

By LARRY EVANS

Author of "Once to Every Man"

CHAPTER VII.

Harrigan, That's Me!

NEVER before had the air of that long, paneled room been so surcharged with half suppressed hilarity. At first her father merely scowled at Barbara's intermittent little gurgles, which refused to stay entirely pent up. He frowned at her seemingly inane interruptions of the technical discussion into which he had immediately plunged with the East Coast company's engineer until he could no longer ignore the smile which pulled at the lips of the latter, too, at every fresh attempt of the girl to swing the conversation into an utterly irrelevant channel. He looked around the table then and caught the gleam in Caleb's eyes. He took note of Miss Sarah's illuminated face and gave way to a burst of querulousness not all simulation.

"What is the joke?" he demanded in a voice that set them all to rocking in their chairs. "Let me in on it, let me laugh, too, if there is anything worth laughing at. Cal, you're growing old—old and feeble witted."

Barbara bobbed her head meekly. Her giggle, however, was shameless. Allison had had experience with his daughter's seeming meekness. Moreover, the working of Caleb's and Sarah's faces baffled him. He waited, fuming.

"Just before you and Uncle Cal came in we—we were talking about the weather," the girl gurgled. "Mr. O'Mara predicted it would rain soon, and I just wanted to ask him what made him think so."

It was very quiet for a moment. Steve sat, a little red of face himself, gazing across into the girl's starry eyes.

"Go ahead," she prompted him, with a gasp.

Then his lips began to curl until a smile overspread his face and half closed his eyes. He leaned back and raised obediently a quaintly solemn, quaintly boyish treble.

"I wa'n't guessin'," he averred soberly, "ner I wa'n't thinkin' it will. It'll jest be rainin' come sun up, and it'll be good fer till Wednesday fer sure."

At the beginning of that quavering statement Dexter Allison's lips fell apart. They remained open long after Steve had finished. Once he started to rise, and then dropped back into his chair, dumfounded. There was no doubt concerning the success of his daughter's query. At last he got to his feet and padded around the table. With a hand on either of the boy's shoulders he turned that browned face up to his own.

"You," he murmured weakly. "You! And Elliott said that you could outguess dear old Mother Nature herself! Well, I—I'm blanked!"

They talked no more business at table that morning, and Allison found scant opportunity to make himself heard at all. Even the reticence which seemed a part of Steve's grave face and big body was swept aside before the tumult of questions that tumbled from Barbara's lips, promptly to be supplemented by Caleb whenever her breath gave out.

It was minutes before Allison could wedge in a single remark, longer than that before he stopped frowning to himself in a fashion which made Caleb remember that moment of inexplicable vehemence outside on the veranda. They had retrogressed as far as the "injine"—the "steam injine"—when Allison finally made himself heard.

"What I can't remember is just why you left us so suddenly. I know it was some sort of a rumpus, with Barbara in it—there's always a woman, of course—but I can't recall"—

He paused to ponder—paused and became aware immediately of Barbara's swift silence and Steve's hint of self consciousness. Then it all returned to him with a rush. He had his turn.

"Oh, but I do remember," he bawled. "Why, of course—of course! It was a matter of knight errantry and ladies fair! But who was it whose choice conflicted with your own?"

He cocked his head on one side, mock thoughtful; then he fell to pounding his knee and roared with laughter.

"Archie Wickersham!" he shouted. "Archie Wickersham—oh, Lord! I never really appreciated that melee until this minute. And you promised that you'd be back, didn't you, and—well, by gad, here you are! Shake hands again, Steve. And, if I may be pardoned the idiom, allow me to assure you that it was some battle!"

If it did nothing else, Allison's pompous raillery served one end. It relieved any sentimental awkwardness which might have attached to the episode and yet the girl rather resented being so completely reduced to terms of farce comedy. When the men arose after breakfast, to go down into the town, she, too, declared her intention of accompanying them, as though there were the expected thing. She crossed the lawn at Steve's side, ahead of her father and Caleb, with Miss Sarah calling from the door. Both men walked for a short time in silence, their eyes upon the slender figure in short skirt and wooly sweater beside the taller one in blue flannel before them. And, as usual, Allison was the first to speak.

"Now I know what you meant when you referred to that trip up the west branch, Cal," he said. "And you were right. It does take stuff to make that sort of gentleman. Isn't there anything more to tell me? I am truly interested, Cal."

So Caleb told him then of "Old Tom's" tin box. And while he was explaining the man and girl ahead, all in one breath, skipped back to that day before yesterday, now many years gone. There was a quality of camaraderie in the girl's half parted lips and eager impulsiveness of tongue that morning that was entirely boyish. But when Steve finally asked for Devereau—Garry Devereau, who had followed him to the hedge gap that day and laid one hand upon his bowed, shamed shoulder—the light went from Barbara's eyes. And Stephen O'Mara, who did not understand at first the quick hurt which entered them, stopped smiling too.

"I liked him," Steve said simply. "I've always remembered and liked him. Thinking of him and—and—has often kept me from being too lonely nights, when I was lonely enough."

"Do you remember a little girl who was at our place the summer you were here?" Barbara then asked. "A pale, red lipped, very shy little thing named Mary Graves?"

Stephen nodded.

"And do you remember how even then Garry seemed to care for her? He was always supercilious with the rest of us; he tormented us or ignored us entirely, but never her."

Again the inclination of the head.

"Well, he grew up just that way," Barbara went on, thoughtfully. "One never could tell what was behind his indifference or—or flippancies. He mocked at things, customs and courses of action, which we have come to accept and—and recognize. But he was always gentle with her, and kind, and—oh, I think reverend is the right word! Now, knowing Garry as I do—as you will when you see him again—the phrase may seem a strange one to apply to him. And yet it describes best his bearing toward Mary Graves two years ago."

She was walking more slowly now, without knowing it.

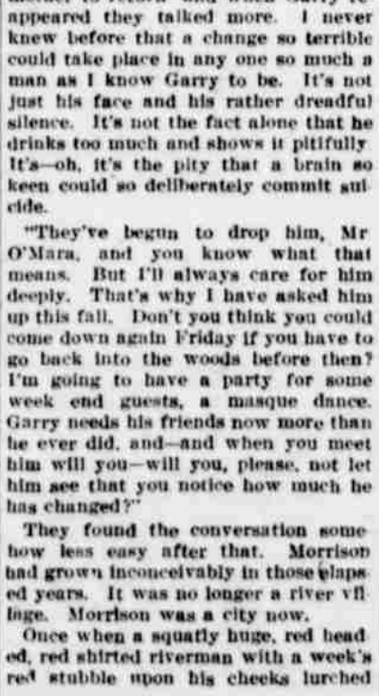
"He loved her with his whole soul, Mr. O'Mara, and she married another man, almost without a word of explanation to him. Nobody ever cited Garry as a shining example, but he—that man whom Mary Graves married—had an unspeakable record! Her family made the match—the newspapers call it a union of America's fairest youth and powerful millions, don't they? Well, he had them—and she married him. And Garret Devereau dropped out of the world for a long time."

"It was a year before he came back. People had already begun to talk about the way his father had gone before him—he shot himself, Mr. O'Mara, when he became tired of waiting for Garry's mother to return—and when Garry reappeared they talked more. I never knew before that a change so terrible could take place in any one so much a man as I know Garry to be. It's not just his face and his rather dreadful silence. It's not the fact alone that he drinks too much and shows it pitifully. It's—oh, it's the pity that a brain so keen could so deliberately commit suicide.

"They've begun to drop him, Mr O'Mara, and you know what that means. But I'll always care for him deeply. That's why I have asked him up this fall. Don't you think you could come down again Friday if you have to go back into the woods before then? I'm going to have a party for some week end guests, a masque dance. Garry needs his friends now more than he ever did, and—and when you meet him will you—will you, please, not let him see that you notice how much he has changed?"

They found the conversation somehow less easy after that. Morrison had grown inconceivably in those elapsed years. It was no longer a river village. Morrison was a city now.

Once when a squatly huge, red headed, red shirted riverman with a week's red stubble upon his cheeks lurched



The Girl Shrank Against Her Companion and Clutched His Arm.

out of a doorway ahead of them and stood snarling malevolently at O'Mara the girl shrank against her companion and clutched his arm. The red shirted one fell to singing after they had passed. A maudlin rendition of "Harrigan, That's Me," followed them long after they had rounded a corner. Steve looked down and smiled casually into Barbara's wide and startled eyes.

"That's a river boss," he explained, "enjoying what he considers a roaring good time. His name is Harrigan. He works on the Reserve company's cut, which we are to move in the spring, and whenever he has had a trifle more than enough he always sings that song. He's willing to fight, too, to prove that it was written especially for him!"

"He's not exactly a friend of yours, is he?" she said.

"Well, not exactly," Steve admitted. "Not when he is in that frame of mind."

"Or in any other," the girl persisted, and she glanced down at her hand, still lying upon the blue flannel sleeve. "Did you know that your arm grew as hard as iron for an instant? I never knew that any one's arm could grow as hard as that. And is that the way you always prepare to receive your—friends?"

Steve colored a little.

"Perhaps I'm overcautious," he replied. "But it has to be hard. It constitutes what one of my men, Joe Morgan, calls 'accident insurance.'"

Then her face lighted up again. The delighted bob of her head with which she greeted that name astonished the man.

"Do you—why, you must have heard of Joe!" he exclaimed.

"Joe Morgan," she laughed. "'Fat Joe,' isn't it? And of course I have heard of him. You don't realize it, but I know more about this East Coast work and—and the men who are doing it than I had any idea myself. Why, I'll wager that you never knew, yourself, that he once wrote in to the officials insisting that the entry of his name on the files be changed from 'Joe Morgan, cook,' to 'Joseph Morgan, assistant to Chief O'Mara!'"

Steve's chuckle of appreciation was answer enough.

"I want to know Joe, please! Can't I meet him, Mr. O'Mara?"

But the question was unnecessary. Joe Morgan—Fat Joe to the river front and the construction squad—was already hustling in their direction, even before Steve, with that slow smile tugging at his lips, had finished assuring her that it was never necessary to summon Joe into the presence of an attractive member of the opposite sex. He came without being called.

"Morning, chief," Fat Joe saluted, in that thin and reedy tenor which none but fat men have.

Steve managed the presentation with extreme punctility and left them. When he returned, almost an hour later, he heard them both laughing long before he came into view, and on the way back up the hill the girl detailed for him much of her conversation with Fat Joe.

"Why should there be any—any element of personal danger in this work you are doing, Mr. O'Mara?" she finally asked. "And did I do wrong in mentioning to Mr. Morgan how that man came out of that—place and glared so at you?"

His rejoinder should have been very reassuring.

"So Joe has been hinting at that mystery stuff again, has he? After listening to him one is compelled to believe that I run daily a veritable gauntlet of nameless perils."

Barbara stood, small fists buried in her sweater pockets, studying his smile of amusement.

"I shouldn't like to believe so," her voice was faintly diffident. "And you—you haven't accepted my invitation for Friday. May I expect you? I didn't tell you, but Archie—Archibald Wickersham—will be there, as well as Garry. So—so you won't be entirely unacquainted."

And then at those words his face changed. All in one fleet second, in spite of the whole morning's quick intimacy of mood and the spirit of companionship which to her had seemed a delightfully new yet time tried thing, Barbara found that she could not read an inch behind those grave gray eyes. She found his quiet countenance as unreadable as that of the utmost stranger might have been. And while she waited, not entirely certain how displeased she was at his deliberation, a blackest of black horses soared splendidly over a fence to the north and came cantering down the road. The rider, a tall, bareheaded girl, lifted her crop in salute as she caught sight of them.

"My friend, Miriam Burrell," the girl murmured in explanation to Steve, and something had gone from her voice and left it conventionally impersonal. "She's riding Ragtime, and isn't he a beauty—almost as much a beauty as she is herself?"

The horse came on, to be reined up at last directly in front of the two at the roadside. Stephen O'Mara met for a moment the level, measuring glance of its rider before Miriam Burrell turned to Barbara.

"I've enjoyed exceedingly our morning canter, Bobs," her alto voice drawled.

Then, before Barbara could reply, she threw one booted leg from the stirrup and dismounted. With the reins looped over her elbow she faced the man in blue flannel and corduroy, a tall, lithe figure with coppery red hair and whitest skin and doubly vivid lips.

"You're Stephen O'Mara," she said. "You're Stephen O'Mara, for a thousand!"

"I've just asked Mr. O'Mara to come to my dance, Miriam," Barbara said, "and how did you know him, pray? I've asked him, but he is unflatteringly long in accepting."

"Know him?" Miriam echoed. "Know him! Oh, Mr. O'Mara and I have met before. I think before the fall of the Roman empire, wasn't it, Mr. O'Mara? Weren't they dragging me in at the wheel of a chariot one afternoon when you were dealing out a gold piece to each of your legionaries?"

She laughed dryly, and Barbara felt smaller and more forlorn and lonelier still.

"No doubt Mr. O'Mara hasn't time to be flattering, Bobs," she commented. "But you will have time to come Friday for a little while, won't you?" she asked.

Steve glanced down at the hand which still felt the pressure of her buckskin clad fingers.

"I have to work day and night some weeks when things break badly," Steve told her simply. "If I can," and he turned to Barbara—"if I can I want to come."

Miriam nodded her head with brisk finality.

"If you can," she agreed. "Barbara no doubt has been telling you about Garret Devereau, hasn't she? Yes, come if you can. I have heard, Mr. O'Mara, that you have once or twice fought your way out of the dark when everybody else had lost hope. I want an opportunity to talk with a specialist in such campaigns."

Stephen O'Mara had read a meaning in the words of that contained, often abrupt, straightly tall girl of which Barbara Allison had not even dreamed. He stood watching them when they turned up the driveway, the horse Ragtime muzzling the woolly white sweater and following like a dog. But he wasn't thinking of Miriam Burrell or of Garry Devereau. He was wondering about Archie Wickersham—the Hon. Archie—thinking about that funny brawl of years before, which had not been so funny after all, wondering if—

Late that night, before she slept, Barbara asked Miriam this question, "Should I have told Mr. O'Mara that my engagement to Archibald Wickersham was to be announced at the party?"

"Why should you have?" Miriam crisply replied.

(To Be Continued)

Posed For Suffragists.

A feature of the mayor's celebration in the New York city stadium on the evening of the Fourth was a symbolic tableau representing Victory 1917 bringing the ballot to the women of New York. Womanhood, Justice and Motherhood made an appeal to the enthroned Empire State in the name of all women. These were symbolized in all the trades, professions and occupations of women. The principal figure in this group and the one which gave it real significance was Miss Blanche Yurka, leading woman with E. H. Sothern in "Lord Dundreary" and lately appearing with him in "Two Virtues."

BLANCHE YURKA.

Home Cookery

Tomatoes and Cheese.

Select good sized tomatoes, smooth and round. Plunge them in boiling water and remove the skins, then chill. Cut them in thick slices and arrange these on a dish with lettuce. Cover the top of each slice with grated American cheese, then add a spoonful of stiff mayonnaise and top with a stuffed olive.

Creamed Fish in Cucumbers.

Flake some cold cooked fish. Make a cream sauce rather thick and add the fish with a dash of lemon juice and reheat. Cut three or four large cucumbers in two lengthwise and scoop out the inside. Drop the shells in very hot water and leave them until heated through, then lift out and wipe dry. Fill these while hot with the fish and serve at once on small heated plates, with a little watercress or parsley.

Shepherd Pie.

The leftover meat should be sliced instead of chopped for this recipe. Butter a baking dish and cover the bottom with hot mashed potatoes. Pour on the gravy and sliced meat and cover with more mashed potatoes. Pile the potatoes on lightly and leave the top uneven. Dot with butter and place in hot oven for ten minutes.

England Has New Money.

In an experimental way banknotes are being printed in England on silk waterproofed by a secret process which

Right In His Line.

Wigg—Your young lawyer friend seems to carry the love of his profession to a ridiculous extreme. Wagg—Yes; I believe he is even going to marry a girl named Sue. — Philadelphia Record.

The Girl at Clancy's Ball

She Had One Short Romance.

By CHARLES ALBERT WILLIAMS

John Harmon of the Morning Bulletin puffed abstractedly upon his cigar and gazed around the tumultuous hall. It was the night of Boss Clancy's ball.

The dancing floor was crowded with rotating men and women. Girls of the shop and factory swayed and gyrated in the clasp of men, coarse featured and unintelligent.

Harmon roused from his contemplation of the noisy scene and turned to his companion, Mowbray of the Recorder.

"If anything's going to break here tonight let it come soon," he remarked. Mowbray shrugged indifferently.

A young girl, her face flushed from the last dance, hurried toward the reporters' table. She was a frail little creature of twenty, blue eyed and blond. Frequently as she approached she looked back and fluttered a frightened glance at a man following her.

"Excuse me," she said half breathlessly, halting before the newspaper men and addressing Harmon. "Help me out of this, please. This man has been annoying me—wants me to dance with him. I'm afraid of him."

"Sit down," Harmon said crisply.

He faced her and affected a conversation.

The man came up presently and, pausing only to glare belligerently at Harmon, reached over and seized the girl's arm.

"Never mind your dandy dude friend," he blurted; "spiel this with me." The girl drew back and shook her head.

"Come on," the stranger insisted, retaining her arm.

The girl made a sudden, violent movement and wrenched herself from his grasp. He leaned forward to clutch her, but Harmon caught his hand.

"What's the use?" he remarked, laughing. "You can't make the girl dance. Don't insist. You'll cause a scene."

The stranger turned to Harmon, his mouth drawn into a menacing snarl.

"Don't mix in this unless"— He waved his hand threateningly. "Well, you don't want to be sorry, do you?" He became enraged at Harmon's cool glance.

"Who are you, anyway?" he bawled. "Know who I am? I'm one of Clancy's men."

Harmon smiled. "I'm not at all interested in your pedigree," he said. "It seems to me you might let her alone in spite of it."

A malignant light glowed in the stranger's eyes.

"Say," he said, "I do things my own way." His voice rose to a shout. "An' this is my gal, see!"

He placed his hands upon Harmon's shoulders. Before the reporter could rise from his chair he was hurled backward, but he caught the edge of the table and escaped a nasty fall.

With lips compressed in an effort to control an outburst, he scrambled to his feet and stood silent a moment considering what he might best do to avert the fellow's violence and yet assist the girl.

He opened his lips to speak, but was interrupted by the cry of "A fight!" which went up from a nearby table.

There was a scuffling of feet, and a group of eager eyed, expectant men and women gathered about them. Mowbray stepped between the two men.

"Steady, John," he said. "This sort of thing is hardly"—

Harmon felt a ringing blow upon his head, then suddenly he went blind and unconscious.

Later, in the hospital, he opened his eyes wide and staring. He stirred uneasily and rolled his pounding head upon the pillows.

Somewhat indistinctly he saw the many cots and heard the heavy breathing of those about him. He was bewildered for a space, but sensations of dull, pulsating pain assured him he was back in a real world.

He wondered just what had occurred, but, contenting himself with the reflection that he would soon learn all from Mowbray, he fell asleep.

He awoke in a world of sunshine and less pain. Save an occasional intermittent numbness and throbbing at the temples he was comfortable.

From the nurse who brought him breakfast he learned that it was almost midday.

"A young woman called to see you early this morning," the nurse told him as he handed her the tray.

"A young woman?" he asked.

The nurse nodded. "She said she'd be back."

Young woman? Harmon was plunged into perplexity by the incident and turned at once to the consideration of this new phase of his adventure.

Of the many young women of his acquaintance he could think of none who might call upon him in his present predicament. One would doubtless visit him upon hearing of his plight, but she had left the city only the preceding afternoon to visit her people in Chicago.

Though he abandoned the enigma after fruitless musings, it recurred to him several times as he lay glancing idly over the morning newspapers.

He was pleased to see that they had omitted any reference to the incident at the ball. For this he mutely thanked Mowbray.

In the evening as the lights were being switched on the nurse announced the return of his visitor.

A few moments afterward she appeared in the doorway. Harmon recognized her in one sweeping glance as she approached his cot—the girl at the ball.

"Well?" he said, repressing his astonishment. She looked timidly down at him.

"You know me?" she asked in a frightened tone. He nodded and smiled to put her at her ease. There was an embarrassed pause.

"I felt I ought to come and thank you," she broke in. He made a careless gesture.

"Quite unavoidable, Miss"—

"Rogers—Sadie Rogers," she prompted, a touch of color appearing in her thin, white cheeks.

Harmon lifted his head and bowed an awkward acknowledgment.

"What happened to me?" he asked.

"No one seemed to know anything about it," she explained, "except that you were hit with a bottle. They couldn't find out who did it. I'm glad, anyway, nobody was arrested. I'd have gone, too, I suppose."

Harmon nodded comprehension.

"How did you find me?" he went on.

"Your friend told me who you were and where they had taken you," she replied, smiling.

She had been standing with her hands behind her as they chatted. Suddenly she made an impulsive little movement and thrust forth a small cluster of roses.

"Will you take these? They help me say 'thanks,'" she said.

Harmon looked at her in surprise and for the first time observed closely her appearance. There was no health in her cheeks, and she looked worn and weary.

The cheap finery of the previous evening had vanished, and in its place had come a coarse black skirt, an ill fitting blue jacket and a broad, flat hat that seemed to accentuate her pale, blue eyed wistfulness.

"It's nice of you," he said at length.

A queer little smile flashed across her face, and she placed the flowers in his hand.

Sadie, faint voiced and diffident, called at the hospital each day thereafter. Her visits were brief and uneventful. She remained for a few moments to exchange the usual commonplaces with Harmon. Always, despite his protests, she brought a cluster of fresh roses.

In the beginning Harmon had decided not to permit her to continue to see him, but she sounded a sympathetic note in his nature, and he found himself unable to send her away.

Though she seemed a poor, pitiable bit of drift, she revealed traces of uncultivated intelligence and refinement, and he became interested in her. In the end he resolved to learn more about her and, if possible, to help her.

"You are going home tomorrow?" she asked on the evening of the last day.

"Not really home," he replied, laughing. "I hail from the country." Her tired face brightened.

"Indeed! I'm from up state myself."

"You're all alone here?" he inquired.

She nodded slowly.

"Tell me about coming here—everything," he invited.

She plucked at a jacket button and seemed reluctant to answer, but after a moment said: "Well, father wasn't a much account man, so when mother died I hired out. We had folks up from New York, and I heard so much about the city I thought it was a great place. So I came.

"I'm not a fool," she continued, with a dispirited smile. "Up in the country I went to school as long as I could, but when I got down here it didn't help me any.

"What could I do? I didn't know anything about offices. I wasn't a type writer, and there wasn't much time to decide, so I went into one of the big stores.

"What I make just about goes round for room and meals and something to wear. Once in awhile there's a moving picture show.

"Clancy's ball was free, so me and a couple of girls went there. But I'll know better next time.

"You know, I'd like to do better, to learn something that'd help me. I tried night school, but I couldn't stand it after working all day. And I can't learn from library books," she concluded, sighing.

Harmon was intent upon every expression of her face.

"Wouldn't it be better if you married soon?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders wearily. "I've thought a lot about that," she said slowly, "and I don't think I can marry the kind o' men I meet."

Harmon looked at her in thoughtful silence.

"Suppose I could help you in a way," he said directly, "would you let me?"

"How?" Her glance was quizzical.

"A young woman at one of the settlements—she's money and could help you that way. She'd fix it so you'd have time to study. Later on you could get a place in an office, and then better things would be possible."

Sadie's wistful blue eyes shone with sudden interest; then she frowned her doubt.

"You're sure she could do it?"

He nodded. "Yes, she's soon to be married and give up her work. She'd be delighted."

"She's going to marry you, maybe?" she asked, dropping her eyes.

"Yes," he answered.

Her voice fell to a whisper. "Oh, I see," she said. She bowed her head and stared at the floor. Then she raised her face and, smiling, extended her hand. "Goodby," she said.